DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 394 123 CS 012 406

TITLE	Reading: An Indispensable Subject for All Middle Grades Students.
INSTITUTION	Middle Grades Reading Network, Evansville, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Lilly Endowment, Inc., Indianapolis, Ind.
PUB DATE	[96]
NOTE	23p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Curriculum Development; *Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; Library Role; *Middle Schools; Parent Participation; *Reading; *Reading Instruction; Reading Teachers; *Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS	*Indiana; Middle School Students

ABSTRACT

Noting that reading instruction for young adolescents in Indiana's middle grades schools has been virtually eliminated, this booklet describes how important reading is in the middle grades and why it continues to deserve attention beyond the elementary years. The booklet proposes a series of actions that educators--teachers, administrators, school librarians, and public librarians--can take to ensure that young adolescents have the supports they need to develop their full capacity as empowered readers in a literate society. Sections of the booklet address how educators are failing Indiana's young adolescents, what happened to time for reading in the middle grades, how to restore time for reading, questions that should be asked when interviewing prospective reading teachers, what should be included in the reading curriculum, how reading teachers should work with public libraries, how reading teachers should work with families to promote reading, what reading teachers can do to connect their students to their school libraries, what schoolwide reading leadership reading teachers should provide, how reading teachers can keep informed of new reading ideas, and how educators can stop the tide. Contains 18 references and 3 figures of data. The Reading Bill of Rights for Indiana's Young Adolescents is attached. (RS)

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Reading

AN INDISPENSABLE SUBJECT FOR ALL MIDDLE GRADES STUDENTS

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Skilled Reading Teachers and Time for Reading Are Essential for Healthy Middle Grades Reading Programs

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Funded by Lilly Endowment Inc.

Reading

An Indispensable Subject for All Middle Grades Students

Skilled Reading Teachers and Time for Reading Are Essential for Healthy Middle Grades Reading Programs

Overview

While all eight areas of the Reading Bill of Rights, as shown on the inside back cover, are important elements in building a Community of Readers, time to read is the most critical element for schools. When reading is not offered as a subject, skilled reading teachers are not available. Without skilled reading teachers, who is there who will engage students with library books, promote schoolwide reading activities, connect with the public library, encourage family reading activities, and provide appropriate support for all middle grades students at their various levels of reading ability?

We believe that this publication makes the case that all middle grades students should be enrolled in a reading class every day, just as they are also daily participants in English, mathematics, science, and social studies classes. If reading is really important in Indiana's middle grades schools, then time will be found for this most important subject.

Reading: An Indispensable Subject for All Middle Grades Students owes its roots to Indiana's Reading Stakeholders, a group of educators who developed *Becoming a Community of Readers: A Blueprint for Indiana* over a period of several years and helped us focus on the need to offer reading as a subject for all middle grades students.

We are grateful to the following persons who gave their time to develop the content and edit various drafts of the publication: Jo Adams, Helfrich Park Middle School, Evansville; Kevin Sue Bailey, Indiana University Southeast; Paul Blohm, Indiana University Northwest; Loran Braught, Indiana State University; Ronald Bush, Hymera School; Linda Cornwell, Indiana Department of Education; Patricia Faught, Farmersburg Middle School; Earlene Holland, Maconaquah School Corporation; Marge Keltner, School City of Hammond; Eden Kuhlenschmidt, River Valley Middle School, Jeffersonville; Eugenia Sacopulos, Dunbar-Pulaski Middle School, Gary; Karen Sipes, South Side Middle School, Anderson; Carl Smith, Indiana University; Darla Staley, Owen Valley Middle School, Spencer; Beth Suderman, Pierre Moran Middle School, Elkhart; and Judith Davidson Wasser, Technical Educational Research Center, Boston.

Restoring reading is not easy. Many factors are involved in change. But schools that have conducted the *Middle Grades Reading Assessment* know where they are and where they need to go, and they have the evidence necessary to justify the restructuring of their schedules to include reading for all students.

Jack W. Humphrey, Director
Middle Grades Reading Network

Reading: Are We Failing Indiana's Young Adolescents?

Over the last several years, we have virtually eliminated reading instruction for young adolescents in Indiana's middle grades schools. This did not happen in one fell swoop. It came about through a series of actions, which at the time may have seemed unrelated but in retrospect had a cumulative effect that led to this end. These actions included the elimination of a specifically designated time for reading and the reduction of school library book purchases. A particularly significant action in this cumulative process was the shifting of responsibility for reading from reading teachers and school librarians to all middle grades teachers. These content area teachers, untrained in the teaching of reading skills, have not been able to provide the expertise, time, and resources needed to engage students with books and other reading materials. The end result has been that, for all intents and purposes, developmental reading (reading instruction for all students) and remedial reading (reading instruction for those students who read two or more grade levels below their expected grade) have disappeared at the middle grades level.

This shift in educational goals and priorities will have disastrous effects on our young people's future and the future of Indiana if we do not act now to remedy this situation. In this paper we describe how important reading is in the middle grades and why it continues to deserve attention beyond the elementary years. We propose a series of actions that educators—teachers, administrators, school librarians, and public librarians—can take to ensure that young adolescents have the supports they need to develop to their full capacity as empowered readers in a literate society.

A little over one-fourth of Indiana residents are under the age of 18. During the next decade, they will make the transition into the adult work world, seeking further education or jobs and undertaking the roles and responsibilities of parents and citizens. Their transition into adult life will be highly dependent upon their educational success, and their educational success rests solidly upon their level of reading achievement.

Approximately three-fourths of these students will graduate from high school; however, one-fourth will drop out. The drop-out population is notorious for its low level of reading achievement. Staying in school, dropping out of school, or going on for further education are decisions frequently made during the middle grades. For most adolescents, their choices will be predicated on their level of reading achievement.

Since reading achievement is the crucial link between middle grades students and their future success, it is therefore surprising

how little attention is given to reading opportunities and instruction for 10- to 15-year-olds in Indiana.

Consider these facts about reading instruction and resources for Indiana middle grades students, as reported in *A Study of Reading in Indiana Middle, Junior, and Senior High Schools* (Humphrey, 1992):

- Today's middle grades students have less time allotted to reading in the school curriculum than their counterparts of 50 years ago.
- Many students are not enrolled in either reading or literature classes.
- Indiana middle grades schools spend, on the average, $1.92 per student per year on reading materials other than textbooks—less than the cost of one paperback.
- School libraries purchase less than one-half book per student each year, resulting in outdated and inadequate book collections.
- Many teachers receive no planned staff development in reading.
- Students have few opportunities to observe adult role models—teachers, parents, school administrators, or other adults—actually engaged in voluntary reading.
- Over one-quarter of Indiana middle grades schools provide no special assistance to students who have fallen behind in reading achievement.
- Few schools make efforts to connect with parents, public libraries, or community agencies to extend young people's reading opportunities beyond the school day.

The list of reading deficiencies has been steadily accumulating. Our school library book collections are woefully inadequate. The typical middle grades reading teacher annually participates in only 3.8 hours of professional development activities. According to the 1990 census, an adolescent in

Figure 1. Results of *Iowa Test of Basic Reading Skills* Testing of Indiana Students in 1944-45, 1976, and 1986.

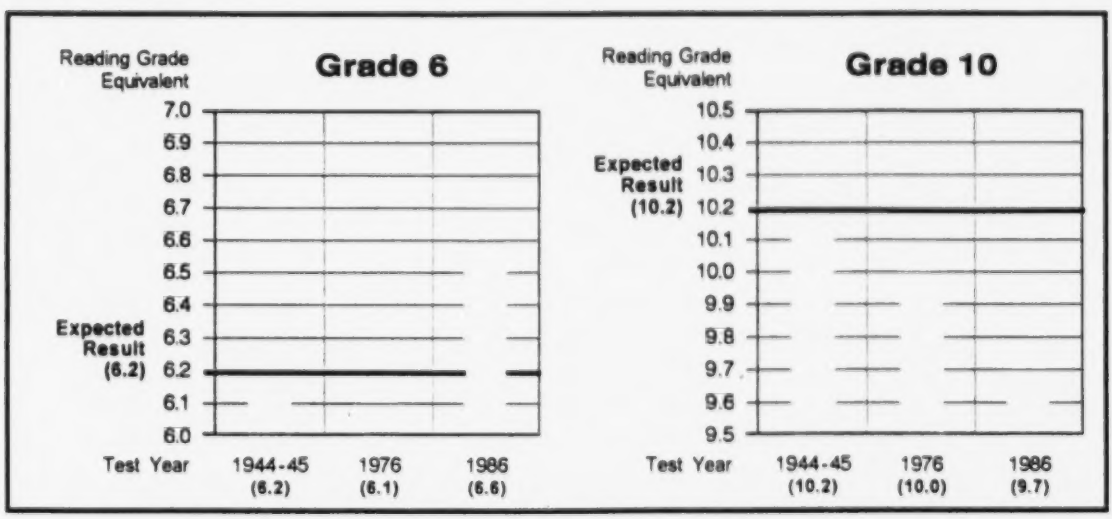
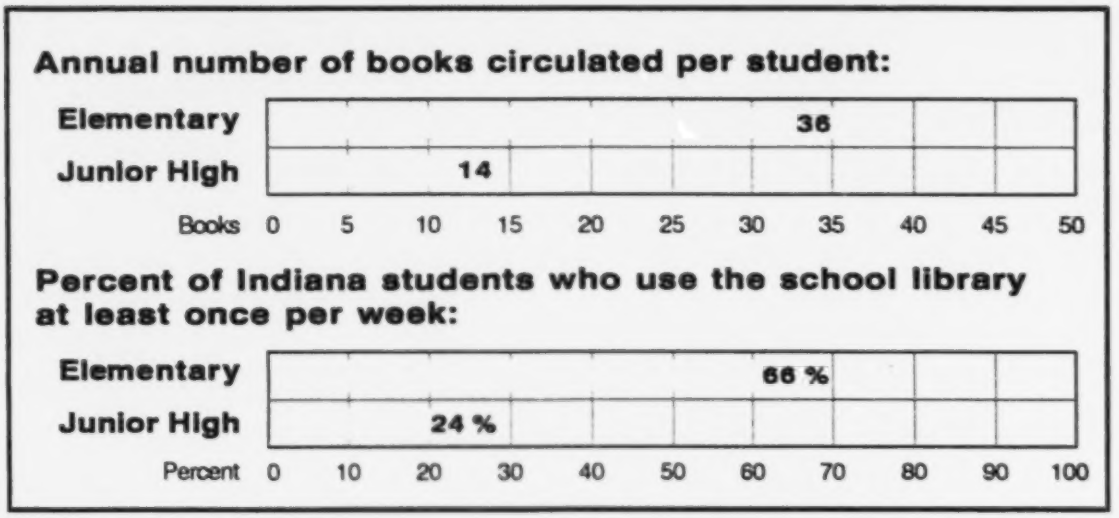


Figure 2. Decline of Library Usage as Students Move From Elementary to Middle Grades Schools.



Indiana is less likely than a child in 48 other states to have a college-educated adult in the home.

We have strong evidence that Indiana's young adolescents enter the middle grades as eager, achieving readers. Indiana ranked 10th out of 41 states participating in the 1994 *National Assessment of Educational Progress*'s 4th grade ratings. Indeed, as shown in Figure 1, elementary reading achievement has increased over the last several decades (Farr, Fay, Myers, & Ginsberg, 1987).

Unfortunately, there is also strong evidence that when Indiana students leave the elementary grades, reading scores begin to decline. Even more telling, this decline in reading scores appears to correspond to the recent decline in supports for young adolescents' reading development. In 1945, when reading was still a part of young adolescents' school day, tenth grade reading scores were significantly higher than they were in 1986 (see Figure 1). Another score card of great importance is the *SAT*, and Indiana students continue to rank low on this test.

The amount of voluntary reading that students do is generally closely correlated to their reading achievement. In Indiana from the sixth grade on up through high school, we find a steady decline in hours students devote to voluntary reading. This is an extremely strong indication that beyond the elementary years, students are not engaged in activities that will help them build the reading skills they will need for the future. In Figure 2, the statistics from "The AIME Statewide Survey of School Library Media Centers" (Callison & Knuth, 1994) show the decline of middle grades library book circulation and student usage of school libraries as compared to elementary schools.

Young adolescents, delicately poised between childhood and adult responsibilities, are at a precarious time in their development. Those in whom we have cultivated an interest in reading and who possess strong reading skills will be willing and able to take advantage of the challenges and opportunities that school and community offer them. Those who have developed neither a curiosity and excitement about

the written word nor the skills to pursue more difficult reading tasks will face increasing pressure in and out of school. This may well lead to a downward spiral in their self-esteem and lowered enthusiasm to perform when reading is required.

We once believed that reading was important. We demonstrated our beliefs through our practices. We made ample time in the school day for reading. We surrounded students with current and useful books, both in classrooms and in school libraries. We made sure that there were teachers with the skills, enthusiasm, and commitment to promote reading.

These beliefs, and the practices that supported them, are no longer to be found in many schools that our young adolescents attend. We have pushed reading aside for other content, neglected school libraries, assigned librarians to study halls, and dismantled the structures critical to our middle grades reading programs. Not surprisingly, middle grades reading achievement has steadily and seriously declined.

A sensible realignment of priorities can communicate to our communities that books and reading are important . . . .

We can turn this state of affairs around. A sensible realignment of priorities can communicate to our communities that books and reading are important in the middle grades. Before we consider what we can do, we need to understand what happened to reading when we converted from K-8 and 9-12 schools to various organizational patterns involving middle grades schools.

What Happened to Time for Reading in the Middle Grades?

School Organization Change

Students who read more, read better; and yet middle grades schools have steadily decreased the amount of time available to students to read. Before 1940 most Indiana students attended K-8 or 1-8 elementary schools; their high schools had a grades 9-12 configuration. The elementary students had a period of reading and a period of English each day through the eighth grade. When junior high schools appeared in the 1940s, many dropped the reading period and incorporated reading into a single English or language arts class, which also included grammar, spelling, writing, and literature. Simultaneously, secondary school teachers with training in grammar, writing, and literature—but **not** reading—were employed in the new junior high schools. Elementary school teachers, who were trained to teach children to read, now taught almost exclusively in grades K-6. These changes in school organization meant that junior high students could receive less than half the instruction previously allotted to reading and from teachers who had no training to teach them reading skills (Simmons, 1991).

Figure 3 shows how some schools removed time for reading and replaced it with time for other content. Many middle grades schools that maintain an eight-period day replaced reading with other subjects. Other schools elected to have fewer but slightly longer periods each day, and the time once provided for reading was added to other subjects.

Figure 3. Middle Grades Student Schedules With and Without Reading as a Subject.

Grades 7-8 Student Schedule of Eight Forty-Minute Periods With Reading Class	Grades 7-8 Student Schedule of Eight Forty-Minute Periods With Reading Period Eliminated	Grades 7-8 Student Schedule of Seven Forty-Five-Minute Periods With No Reading Class and Time Given to Other Subjects
Art and Music	Art and Music	Art and Music
Health and Physical Education	Health and Physical Education	Health and Physical Education
Home Economics and Industrial Arts	Home Economics and Industrial Arts	Home Economics and Industrial Arts
Reading	Band, Choir, Computers, Foreign Language	Language Arts
English	Language Arts	Mathematics
Mathematics	Mathematics	Science
Science	Science	Social Studies
Social Studies	Social Studies	

Code Change

The state of Indiana publishes an administrative code that provides direction for its schools. Over time, the code gradually reduced the minimum amount of time for reading in grades 6-8. In 1971 elementary schools were defined as grades 1-8. Junior high schools were encouraged to use the traditional elementary school curriculum for the seventh and eighth grades. This gave all students a period of actual reading instruction each day through the eighth grade.

By 1976 the code stated that the first two years of a junior high school **may** (not **shall**) include instruction in elementary subjects and might include other subjects as well. The other subjects—for example, foreign language—naturally needed time in the curriculum, and reading was no longer a daily subject for many students.

In 1984 the code required language arts (the term **reading** is no longer used) to encompass 55 percent of the curriculum in grades 1-3; 35 percent in grade 4; 30 percent in grades 5 and 6; and 15 percent in schools with grades 6-8, with the provision that language arts could be expanded during elective time. Language arts is an omnibus term that encompasses grammar, spelling, composition, and sometimes even speech or media studies, as well as reading. Thus the switch from reading to language arts is more than just a change in terminology; it indicates also a shift in time away from reading.

The shift from reading to language arts is exacerbated by accompanying schedule manipulations in the middle grades. In 1991 the minimum number of in-school minutes per week was 1500 in grades 1-6 and 1800 in grades 7-12. The code called for 750 minutes per week for language arts in grades 1-3, 525 minutes in grade 4, 450 minutes in grades 5-6—but only 400 minutes when grade 6 is a part of a middle school—and 200 minutes for grades

7-8. These legislative changes significantly reduced the mandated time to be devoted to language arts for most students. Assuming that an elementary school followed the 1500-minute minimum school week, language arts instruction could be reduced by 9 percent in grades 1-3 from the 1984 standard. There would be no change for grades 4-6. However, in a middle school, 400 minutes for grade 6 could represent a reduction of 11 percent. In a junior high school with an 1800-minute school week, mandated language arts instruction could also be reduced by as much as 11 percent.

Time on Task

It is unfortunate that only 31 percent of Indiana middle schools require a course in reading (Malinka & Millikan, 1991) compared to a national average of 71 percent (Alexander & McEwin, 1989). Comparing the time spent in reading 50 years ago (when most Indiana students in grades 6-8 had a period of reading instruction each day) to the time allocated in most of Indiana's middle grades today, one finds that students have considerably less time for reading. This lack of emphasis on time for reading in Indiana is occurring in an era when, nationally, effective schools are characterized as devoting more time to reading than less effective schools (Redding, 1991).

Those schools that do require strong support for reading have higher reading achievement. When comparing 20 Indiana schools that list reading as a high priority with 20 schools where reading is given a low priority, there is a vast difference. Schools that regard reading as a high priority provide access to books, have adults who serve as effective role models, encourage teacher participation in staff development activities, provide more time for reading, offer special reading help to the majority of the students who need assistance, and work closely with public libraries and community organizations. Because their ambitious reading activities are a barometer of the enormous vitality that resonates within the school, they have higher attendance rates and test scores (Humphrey, 1992).

How Do We Restore Time for Reading?

There is an old saying: "You always have time for what is important." If reading is important in a middle grades school, then time will be found for reading. It costs no more to have classes in reading than any other subject. Unfortunately, there is a major problem.

A decision to eliminate reading as a period was often made in Indiana schools at the time middle grades schools were created. The program was determined and teachers were hired for that program. In those schools that eliminated reading as a subject, reading teachers were not needed. So other teachers were hired. If certified reading teachers are not available from the existing staff in a school, reading teachers can usually be added only when vacancies occur. Thus schools may be able to restore reading only gradually as new teachers are hired.

True middle grades schools organize teachers into teams. Academic teams should be composed of one teacher from each of the following areas: English, mathematics, science, social studies, **and reading**.

What Questions Should We Ask When Interviewing Prospective Reading Teachers?

When screening candidates for a reading teacher position, the school librarian and reading teachers should be included as a part of the interview process. This enhances the team approach by involving people who can work together to build a strong reading program. Besides questions normally asked of prospective teachers, some or all of the following should be used:

- **What books are you reading?** Reading teachers are important reading role models and should be reading on their own. The discussion may involve book titles, favorite authors, or other reading materials, such as newspapers and magazines.

- **To what professional organizations do you belong?** Reading teachers should be aware of effective reading instruction practices and current research. The Indiana State Reading Association and the International Reading Association are the two important professional organizations for prospective reading teachers. The discussion may involve attendance at conferences and subscriptions to professional journals.

- **What college reading courses did you complete?** Reading teachers need a strong background in the areas they teach. The following courses would be helpful: developmental reading, content area reading, analysis of reading ability, corrective/diagnostic/remedial reading, psycholinguistics/language development and reading, and literature for adolescents. A teacher with a reading endorsement will have completed this work. If the prospective teacher has an incomplete background, a second question might concern the willingness of the candidate to complete further courses.

- **Do you believe all middle grades students can read?** Many students in the middle grades still need strong teacher support to help them improve their reading skills and to encourage them to read voluntarily. What they do not need is a teacher who feels that it is too late to help students who are labeled as being incapable of reading at their grade level.

- **What kind of in-service training do you want from the school corporation?** The answer will help the interviewer understand the candidate's interest in useful professional development and may help determine future programs that the corporation should offer.

- **How would you encourage parents to be supportive to the reading program?** Many families are not connected to school activities, especially those involving academics. It is important that reading teachers believe that it is possible to maintain continuing parental involvement. Look for creative suggestions.

- **What evidence of progress will you seek from your students?** In addition to standardized test results, candidates may discuss means such as portfolios, teacher observation checklists, informal reading tests, and observations.

- **Name three of your favorite young adolescent books or authors.** There is no correct answer, for there are many books available. A follow-up question for those unable to provide an answer might be, **How would you become familiar with quality young adolescent books and authors?**

- **Do you have a public library card?** Because it is important to help students become lifelong readers, teachers themselves need to become familiar with their public library. Teachers who do not have public library cards obviously are not using the public library.

- **As one of our reading teachers, in what ways would you promote reading throughout the school and community?** Young adults need reading teachers who are advocates and action-takers. The candidate might discuss ways to get the entire school and community into reading. Ideas might include using posters and displays, connecting students with their school and public libraries, involving the school in the Young Hoosier Book Award Program, starting a Student-Operated Paperback Bookshop or a Teachers Under Cover book group for teachers, promoting reading aloud to students, and supporting the Newspaper in Education Program.

What Should Be Included in the Reading Curriculum?

Each school or school corporation must determine the reading curriculum that will best serve its students. The following items might be considered as criteria for standards and activities that one should see in middle grades schools with strong reading programs:

- Access to current and interesting books and other reading materials within the reading classroom and time to read the materials.

- Reasonable access to the school library.

- Reading aloud to students.

- Direct instruction in skills, vocabulary, and comprehension.

- Assistance in reading skills needed in other content areas, such as social studies and science.

- Improving rate while maintaining good comprehension.

- Flexible groups, such as literature circles.
- Partner reading.
- Sustained silent reading.
- Recommended book lists.
- Ongoing assessment of students to determine reading achievement.
- Sharing assessment information with all teachers to promote reading achievement.
- Activities involving books and authors.

What Materials Are Useful?

A clearly articulated reading program will use materials at various grade levels for specific purposes. There is no need for students to have the same books stressed in the eighth grade as were featured in the sixth grade. Therefore, teachers will need to cooperate so that there is no unnecessary overlapping of materials.

While there are thousands of choices, the following will help teachers as they prepare lists of materials to support their programs:

- Textbooks.
- Classroom libraries.
- Reference materials.
- Books on tape.
- Computer programs that support reading, such as those that accompany the Young Hoosier Book Award Program.
- Indiana Department of Education Read-Aloud books.
- Posters, such as those available from the American Library Association.
- High-interest books at a variety of reading levels.
- Newspapers and young adult magazines.
- Supplementary books and programs emphasizing skills, vocabulary, and comprehension.

- Current and useful school library reading materials.

- Items of use in any room, such as an overhead projector and computer with CD-ROM and on-line services.

- Professional texts and reading materials for teachers to use as references and resources.

How Should Reading Teachers Work With Public Libraries?

According to the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, one-third of a student's vocabulary is gained through voluntary reading. Public libraries provide access to books and other reading materials and, unlike school libraries, are open evenings, weekends, and throughout the summer. We can help students improve their grades, test scores, and personal development by promoting use of the public library.

The following are some suggestions to promote student and faculty use of the public library:

- Work with the public library to help all students obtain public library cards.

- Ensure that all students visit the nearest public library at least once during the middle grades.

- Invite a public librarian to explain library resources and programs at a faculty meeting, or have the faculty meeting at the public library.

- Write articles for the school or PTA newsletter that promote reading in the public library.

- Distribute information to students about public library programs.

How Should Reading Teachers Work With Families to Promote Reading?

There are obvious advantages for children who live in an active reading household. However, there are many reasons why parents do not model a good home reading environment. These factors frequently result in parents relying exclusively upon schools to provide all reading development for their children. Parents may not understand that attention to reading achievement is as important in the middle grades as it is in the elementary years.

Rather than blame families for not being involved in their children's reading activities, we need to help them find their role in the reading development of their young adolescents. The following are some suggestions:

- Include in the reading portfolio lists of books that students have read, along with their reading interests, and share these with parents during conferences.

- Provide lists of books to families, and encourage them to purchase books as gifts for birthdays and holidays.

- Start a Parents Sharing Books Program that encourages students and their parents to read the same book and share their ideas about it.

What Can Reading Teachers Do to Connect Their Students With Their School Libraries?

School librarians and reading teachers are indispensable partners. The following are suggestions as to how reading teachers can be good partners with librarians:

- Take students to the library and stay with them as they select books and magazines.
- Read book reviews and recommend books for the school library.
- Invite the librarian to booktalk new titles during faculty meetings.
- Invite the librarian to present booktalks in the classroom.
- Jointly plan an author visit to the school.
- Plan activities with the librarian around reading for National Library Week.
- Jointly develop read-aloud lists for specific content areas.
- Jointly sponsor a book club or student-operated bookshop.
- Jointly sponsor a book fair.

What Schoolwide Reading Leadership Should Reading Teachers Provide?

Reading teachers, along with the school librarian, can provide many schoolwide programs to promote reading within their schools. Indeed, as many school districts downsize at the district level and/or shift to site-based management, school-level reading specialists become more and more important resources. The professional development support they provide in helping faculty understand young adolescent reading needs and the best ways to address these needs is critical. The following are suggestions for reading teachers:

- Serve as a resource person to content area teachers.
- Provide incentive programs to encourage reading.
- Become a member and leader in the local reading council and in the Indiana State Reading Association.
- Provide in-service training for the staff.
- Encourage other teachers to read for enjoyment and professional growth.
- Promote summer reading.
- Promote public libraries.
- Model booktalking and reading aloud to students.
- Establish and maintain programs such as Teachers Under Cover, Student-Operated Paperback Bookshop, Young Hoosier Book Award, Indiana Department of Education Read-Alouds, Parents Sharing Books, and Newspaper in Education.
- Sponsor author visits.
- Provide interesting information about the school's reading program to the news media.

How Does a Reading Teacher Keep Informed of New Reading Ideas?

Indiana's students deserve reading teachers who continually seek to renew their skills and excitement through participation in diverse professional development activities. The following are ideas to help reading teachers upgrade their skills and knowledge about current reading instructional techniques and to help them keep current with children's and young adult literature:

- Participate in local reading meetings, including those offered by the school corporation and the local reading council.
- Enroll in any of the following college courses not previously taken: developmental reading, content area reading, analysis of reading ability, corrective/diagnostic/remedial reading, psycholinguistics/language development and reading, and literature for adolescents.
- Attend the annual Indiana State Reading Association Conference and other local, regional, state, and national conferences.

- Visit other schools.
- Read professional journals, including *Indiana Reading Journal*, *The Reading Teacher*, and *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*.
- Maintain a working relationship with college reading professors.

What Must We Do Now?

The Middle Grades Reading Network's Stakeholder group drafted an action plan for the state of Indiana. In that plan, *Becoming a Community of Readers: A Blueprint for Indiana* (1995), they argue for three important actions that would provide all middle grades students with skilled reading teachers and time for reading:

1. The state should provide a clear path for licensing middle grades reading teachers equivalent to that required of English, mathematics, science, and social studies teachers. The requirements should include reading course work in the following areas: developmental reading, content area reading, analysis of reading ability, corrective/diagnostic/remedial reading, psycholinguistics/language development and reading, and literature for adolescents.
2. School corporations should provide the same number of skilled reading teachers for the middle grades as provided for the subjects of English, mathematics, science, and social studies.
3. School corporations should provide the same amount of time for middle grades reading as provided for the subjects of English, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Conclusion: How Can We Stop the Tide?

Building strong reading skills is a complex task, particularly by the time young people reach the middle grades. At the middle grades level, young adolescents are called upon to employ their reading skills as a tool for learning about different subject areas, from environmental science and history to algebra and current events. They begin to learn how to appreciate texts as literature—reading and studying novels, poems, plays, and essays. Schools that are technologically oriented present more, not less, challenge to middle grades readers. E-mail, "surfing the Net," conducting research through Internet resources, creating hypermedia presentations—all of these activities require much reading and the integration of reading skills with other forms of learning. The reading tasks of the middle grades are preparation for the future—be it higher education, advanced technical training, or on-the-job learning.

Students who possess strong reading skills will excel; those who do not will fail. The middle grades are the time when this final sorting out occurs, for decisions to drop out are often made during these years. Those who leave school or who complete but leave without plans for further training or employment are, by and large, those with limited reading achievement.

Developing strong middle grades readers requires many different kinds of supports, including time, access, emphasis, skilled reading teachers, and a supportive administration. These pieces cannot come together within the school without support from outside the school from public librarians, parents, and concerned legislators.

Unfortunately, in Indiana we dismantled many of the pieces required for supporting young adolescent readers in middle grades schools. Bit by bit, we threw away the critical elements of strong reading programs—from the required period of reading and support for school libraries to the skilled reading teachers and professional development support. The dismantling happened gradually and often in the pursuit of goals that, in and of themselves, were of merit. However, because no one was looking at the big picture of reading in the middle grades, there was no one to sound the alarm as the quality of our reading programs gradually slipped away.

It is not too late to turn the tide. We can reestablish good reading instruction in the middle grades. This report describes many specific actions that schools and their community supports can take to build the quality of reading instruction for young adolescents. Many of these suggestions could be implemented today, but some, such as the certification and legislative ideas, will require collaboration and hard work to put into place.

We cannot afford **not** to take action. Just as we know what a comprehensive reading program for young adolescents should consist of, we also know what the consequences are if we do not provide good reading instruction in the middle grades. The evidence is overwhelming. Not supporting middle grades readers means, in the end, diminished opportunities for them and for Indiana as it moves into the twenty-first century. More than ever, our citizens will need strong reading skills to acquit themselves well as we enter a new technological age, one in which the most important commodity we have will be our intellectual abilities. In such a world, literacy reigns.

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Reading Bill of Rights for Indiana's Young Adolescents

All young adolescents in Indiana need access to the kinds of reading opportunities that will allow them to grow up to be successful members of a literate community. It is the responsibility of the entire community to offer support for providing these opportunities. Our ultimate goal is the creation of **Communities of Readers** where each young adolescent will be able to fulfill his or her potential as a reader.

To that end, we believe that Indiana's young adolescents deserve:

1. **Access to Books** *Access to current, appealing, high-interest, and useful books and other reading materials in their classrooms, homes, public and school libraries, and other locations within the community.*

2. **Encouragement to Value Reading** *Schools that feature an environment where reading is valued, promoted, and encouraged.*

3. **Time to Read** *Dedicated time during the school day to read for a variety of purposes—for pleasure, information, and exploration.*

4. **Skilled Reading Leaders** *Teachers and school librarians who continually seek to renew their skills and excitement in sharing reading with young people through participation in diverse professional development activities.*

5. **Public Library Support** *Public libraries that provide services specifically designed to engage young people's interest in reading.*

6. **Community Agency Support** *Community-based programs that encourage them in all aspects of their reading development.*

7. **Family Support** *Opportunities for reading at home and support from schools, public libraries, and community agencies to families with young adolescents to encourage family reading activities.*

8. **Reading Role Models** *Communities of Readers in which all adults—in school, at home, and across the community—serve as role models and provide guidance to ensure that reading is a priority in young people's lives.*

By strengthening and bringing together these eight components, we believe that we can make Indiana a **Community of Readers** in which young adolescents will thrive. Indeed, it is only in such an environment that young people will have the opportunities to become prepared to meet the challenges of the future.

MIDDLE GRADES READING NETWORK
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